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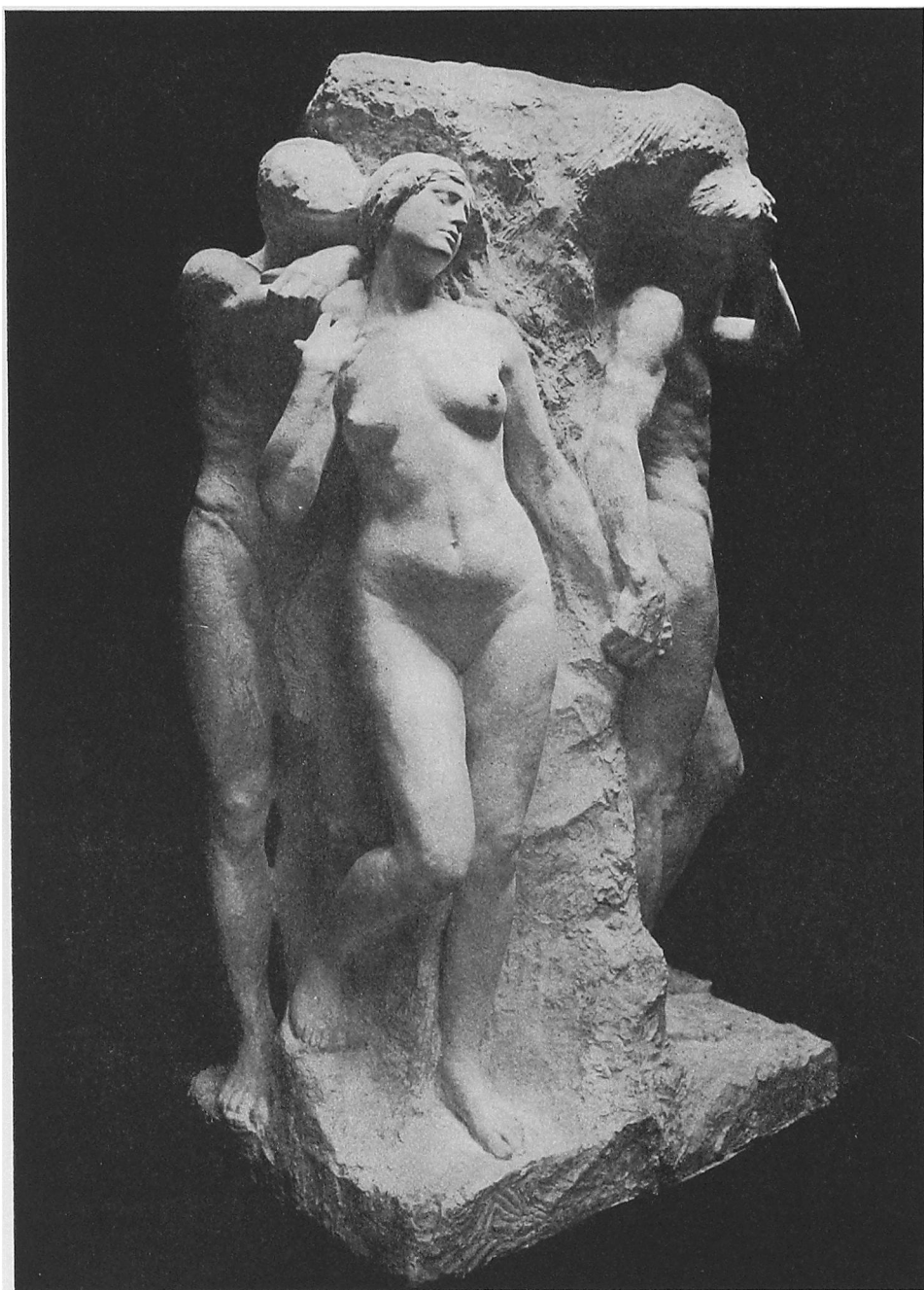
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THE SOLITUDE OF THE SOUL
By Lorado Taft



IDYLL
By LORADO TAFT



IN GLIMMERING GLOW
By Val Davis, R. B. A.

—Exhibited at the Royal Academy

Current Art Topics

By "MAHLSTICK," London Correspondent

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THE year now on the very eve of its departure—its going unregretted as of some one who has never been a welcome guest—closes in a gloom deeper than that which ushered it in. From horizon to horizon the war cloud hangs—a black pall, unrelieved by any rift or gleam; which indeed the nations seem to have ceased to look for, hardly to hope for, except possibly in some future day, with which, it really seems, they need not at present concern themselves. As a consequence there are many instances of the illimitable adaptability of human nature appearing in the papers. One of these has amazingly caught the public fancy and supplies the catch-

phrase of the moment; it represents two soldiers peering above their dug-out, neither of them particularly happy or contented with the situation, which is more or less hell let loose. "Well," says one to the other, "if you think you know a better 'ole than this, you'd better go to it." The drawings are palpably the work of an untrained hand, but they give with white hot truth under their casual unaffected fun and humor, vivid glimpses of the life that is lived and suffered, only a few score miles from where these lines are being written in quiet and security. I met a friend lately back for a few days' leave; he gleefully recounted his pleasure at the opportunity of getting back



PASSING OF AUTUMN
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to his studio and boasted that he had already made good headway with a large canvas. Another, a private, a distinguished portrait painter, sets up his sticks in his tent and paints his Commanding Officers, in fact several military portraits in last year's Royal Academy came into being under such conditions.

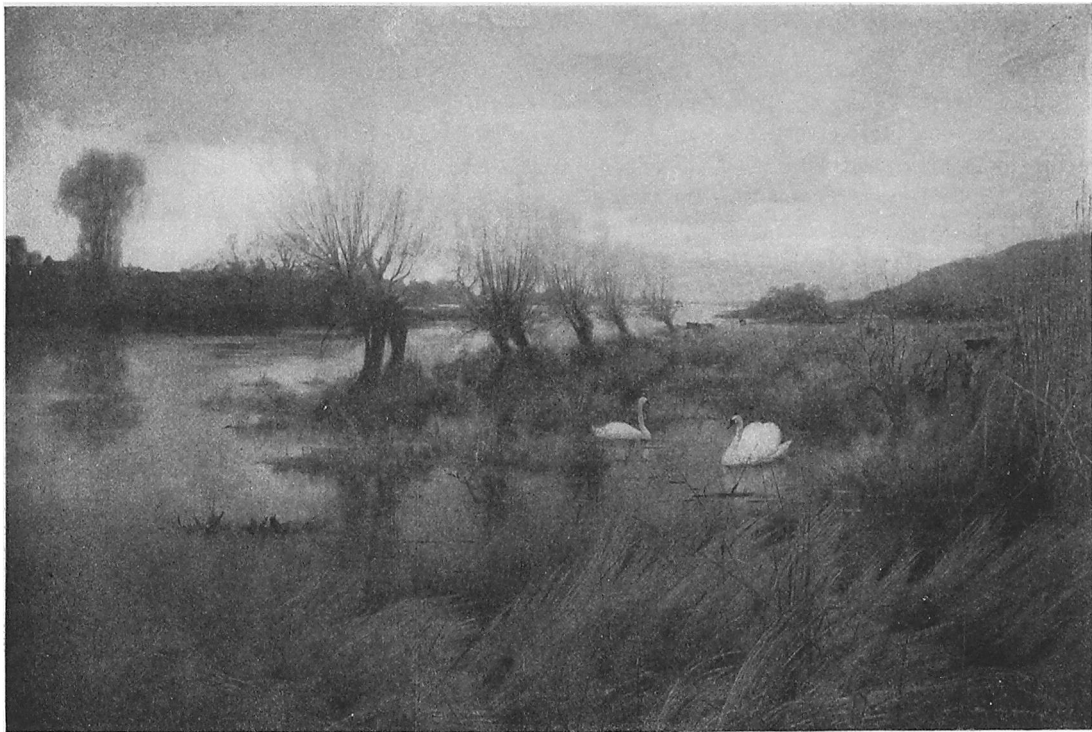
There is a certain activity in art matters just at present and this is reflected in the sales which are again being conducted at Christie's, where very fair prices have obtained. As a matter of fact all the corporate London and Provincial Exhibitions opened last year as usual. At the moment the "Old Water Colour Society," the "New English," the "International" and the "Royal Institute of Oil Painters," among others, claim a visit from those interested in art. In company with a friend I recently looked in at the galleries of the latter exhibition; the general level of attainment

was high, but there were not many pictures there which showed any endeavor to get away from conventional and familiar subjects and motifs. Mr. Steven Spurrier may be claimed among those who have ventured somewhat. Both his attempts, however, are only relatively original or new, as they are in a vein already exploited by Orpen, Simpson, Nicholson and James Pryde, and amusing and interesting as some of the work of this type has proved, yet at its best it ought only to be considered as an amusing excursion or experiment—the whim of an idle hour in the studio—and not in any way as a fresh phase or development in art.

It mainly consists in regarding the world as a miniature stage or puppet show wherein the figures and background are proportioned, lighted and posed, precisely as in a toy wire-moved drama. Pryde and Orpen and others, taking advantage of the freedom from any

hampering laws or facts, have produced some pictures decorative, weird and fascinating and suggesting a world where moving dramas occur in a sort of nightmare of columns, curtains and arches of Titanic size and towering loftiness, deepest glooms and rifts of light. In this sort of elfin land, tones, chiaroscuro and color can be arbitrarily disposed to great advantage and with comparative ease, but the obvious artificiality of the scenes portrayed, combined with a very realistic presentment of the facts, gives a flavor of which one soon tires. They are as unsatisfying and finally as irritating as a puppet show itself. Another phase of this fashion in painting is to visualize men and women as figures in china or delft in the colors and attitudes of Toby jugs or Dresden shepherdesses, and generally against a background of deepest black, as though they alone possessed the power to reflect light. Mr. Spurrier has achieved some startling effects in this way, but it seems to me a waste of his great talent thus to enter into competition with the art of the potter, whose crude reds, blues and yellows mellowed by

his glazes with their varied lights and reflections, while tolerable, perhaps, in a beer tankard or a tobacco jar, are distinctly trying in pigments on canvas. In his subject "Tea Time," the effect is very much that of a Majolica plaque. All this purposeless experiment and restless wandering from one extreme to another is not, as is frequently imagined, a sign of vitality and growth, it is but too often a weariness, a want of conviction, a malaise. It characterized none of the great periods or great masters of the past, nor is it found in the stronger schools and men of the present. In the progress of art from the primitives through the renaissance to the successive developments in the Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Flemish, French and English schools, each stage and phase was marked by a firm faith in its ideals and a steady pursuit of them without wanderings or seekings after "strange gods or idols." In our day the art of Sargent or Brangwyn, of Corot or Collings, has never emulated the variety or quick changes of the cinema film. It has developed certainly, but by way of steady consistent growth, not by



CHILL, NOVEMBER
By Val Davis, R. E. A.

—Exhibited at the Royal Academy

and sentiments, whether conscious or intuitive. spasmodic disconnected ventures with every new fad in technique or theory that comes along. Cyrus Cuneo exhibits a portrait of a brother member of the "Langham"—G. G. Kilburne—which is one of the most notable things in the exhibition. It depicts Mr. Kilburne—who has attended the Club for over half a century—doing a sketch on one of the famous "Friday evenings," the portrait with its background and numerous accessories had to be completed, therefore, in the regulation two hours; measured as a time task it is a tour de force. Art is not concerned of course with mere dexterity as such, but Sargent himself might be proud of this fine piece of characterization, color and vivacious technique. For refinement and distinction there is nothing in the exhibition to surpass N. H. J. Baird's "Mists on the Wold"—a pair of white horses resting, after ploughing, in a silvery, misty landscape.

The election of Charles Sims to full membership of the Royal Academy is unusual so early in an artist's career, for he is barely forty years of age. Sir John Millais was perhaps the youngest man ever granted full Academic honors—he was about thirty, and what a career his proved to be. Famous in the early twenties, considered for sheer mastery to be the most brilliant member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, he was quickly earning by his painting, a princely income, which he continued to make to the end of his fairly long life. His house was one of the finest in the fashionable Kensington of his day; he had a deer forest in Scotland, a villa on the Riviera. He was the friend, guest and frequently the host of Royalty, of Ministers and Ambassadors. His art was approved and admired by artists and critics and delectante at home and abroad, and is still considered to reflect honor on his country. Tall, stalwart, bronzed, his clear cut features and commanding presence suggested anything but the average conception of an artist as a pale-faced, long-haired individual in a velvet coat; he looked

an ideal English Squire, a part I understand he quite lived up to and desired to fill when away from his easel. To few men has been granted such a full measure of life's honors, triumphs and satisfactions.

When the war cloud unrolled itself across the zenith one of its minor results was that all the German art publications, Kunstoerhalle, Jugend, Simplicissimus, etc., were barred and excluded from the dominions of the Allied Powers. In England some enterprising individuals have brought out a paper under the title of "Colour," which is evidently meant to supply the place of Jugend and Simplicissimus. It affects, as they did, the "ultra-modern"; the garish color, ugly angular patterns, wilful and perverse drawing and distortion, but on the whole it has, to its credit, avoided the foulness and indecency of the clever journals, its originals.

EDITOR'S NOTE.—The illustrations for this article are from the works of the famous English artist, Val Davis, whose papers under the "Mahlstick" nom de plume have been a leading feature in the editorial pages of the FINE ARTS JOURNAL for the past year. We are happy to have an opportunity of presenting these landscapes in connection with his latest article and to announce that his work in this magazine will be continued during the coming twelve months.

The illustrations afford a very fair idea of the beauty of these canvases which are strong in composition and not mere color studies. Their dignity and balance are admirable and their luminous and atmospheric qualities bespeak the influence of modern ideals though the method is not so broad as to obliterate interest in textures, which here become supplemental to composition and form.

One might say that Val Davis had achieved *disideratum* of combining what was best in all schools were it not fairer to remark that he has done his work in an individual manner which is a sincere expression of his own ideals